

# Banana Republic, Why Turn Plastic into CO2 and Plastic Waste from Ships

Michael Stephen, an international expert on bioplastics, shares his thoughts and opinion on important issues impacting the bioplastics industry. Today, Michael writes about Banana Republic, Why Turn Plastic into CO2, Plastic Waste from Ships.



## BANANA REPUBLIC?

I am reminded that on 28th March 2019 the London Evening Standard published an article by Maggie Pagano, quoting me as saying that “The EU is acting like a banana republic in the way it is rushing through this ban and not waiting for the outcome of its own scientific investigation.”

The article also carried a quote from the distinguished international lawyer Miriam Gonzalez Durantez, that the proposed ban “is unfair, discriminatory and a clear abuse of power, that deprives European society at large from their right to fair treatment by the EU institutions.”

Shortly after this article appeared I received a complaint from one of the banana-producing countries of Latin America, who said I should not be likening her country to an organisation which behaves as badly as the European Union!

## WHY TURN PLASTIC INTO CO2?

It is well known that “compostable” plastic marketed as complying with EN13432 or ASTM D6400 does not convert into compost. This is because those standards require the plastic to convert rapidly into CO2

What therefore is the point of this type of plastic?

If plastic gets collected there are better things to do with it than convert it into a greenhouse gas. Plastic can be incinerated in a modern non-polluting incinerator to extract its calorific value and generate electricity. Plastic can also be recycled, but “compostable” plastic cannot be recycled with ordinary plastic.

For plastic which does not get collected, the best option is oxo-biodegradable plastic, which is designed for rapid biodegradation in the open environment. By contrast, “compostable” plastic is tested to biodegrade in the special conditions found in an industrial composting facility, not in the open environment.

## PLASTIC WASTE FROM SHIPS

Nobody knows for certain the origin of each piece of plastic waste found in the oceans. Responsible captains will not permit their crews to jettison plastic waste into the ocean, but it is reasonable to assume that a significant amount is thrown overboard by people who do not seem to care whether plastic is biodegradable or not.

Countries such as Panama, Liberia, and the Marshall Islands, with large numbers of ships on their register, are all keen to ensure the protection of the marine environment, so they should require their ships to use oxo-biodegradable plastic. In the event that it does find its way into the ocean it will quickly biodegrade and be recycled back into nature.

## Michael Stephen

Michael Stephen is a lawyer and was a member of the United Kingdom Parliament, where he served on the Environment Select Committee. When he left Parliament Symphony Environmental Technologies Plc. attracted his attention because of his interest in the environment. He is now Deputy Chairman of Symphony, which is listed on the AIM market of the London Stock Exchange, and is the founder and Chairman of the Oxo-biodegradable Plastics Association.

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